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UDK 069.01:008

008:069.01

316.74:069

Review paper

Received: March 27, 2009

Accepted: April 7, 2009

# Cultural Studies and its Contribution to Understanding the Phenomena of Rapid Museum Growth

*The “museum boom” is the phenomenon of rapid growth in the number of museums over the last several decades. I will try to find the reasons for the progressive growth of the number of museums from the standpoint of the discourse of cultural studies, explain the meaning of the role of museums in contemporary society and in the context of various relations of power through the analysis of texts of the several most prominent cultural theorists (R. Williams, S. Hall, R. Johnson, T. Bennett, T. Eagleton). Through the questioning of the terms “lived”/“recorded” culture, the culture of the “selective tradition”, ‘documentary’, “ideal” and ‘social’ culture, the ‘structure of feelings’, identity /”identification”, I will try to answer the question whether museums really meet the needs they create and whether we need them at all.*

**Key words:** cultural studies, role of museum, contemporary society

## Introduction

**I**n the last quarter of the last century great changes in museum practice and museums as cultural and heritage institutions took place. One of the more significant ones is the trend of the museum *boom*, i.e., the phenomenon of the progressive growth in the number of newly built and reconstructed museums. Data reveal that the growth rate was the largest in the

period between the 1960s and the 1980s, when one to two museums a week used to be opened in the developed European countries, while the growth somewhat decreased in the 1990s.<sup>1</sup> For example, in Great Britain museums spring up like mushrooms:<sup>2</sup> from the 1860s to the present approximately 1600 museums were established, about 800 of them in the period between 1971 and 1987, which amounts to approximately a museum per week.<sup>3</sup> In one year in Germany (1988-1989) 189 new museums were established, which is 3.5 museums per week on average!<sup>4</sup> The trend of growth in the number of museums in Germany continued, and according to the European group on museum statistics<sup>5</sup> in 1998 there was the total of 5755 museums, 6059 in 2002 and 6197 in 2007.<sup>6</sup> The data on the growth of the number of world museums' collections, increase in the number of employees, volunteers, museum friends, financial parameters and, of course, the number of visitors, are equally fascinating. According to the Register of museums, galleries and collections of the Republic of Croatia 203 museums were registered in 2006.<sup>7</sup> Regardless of the long and rich history (the Archeological Museum in Split was founded in 1820), Croatia lags behind the more developed countries. The "boom" of museums in Croatia happened during the 1950s and in the period between 1960 and 1990, when about thirty new museums used to be established each decade. The political situation and periods of war (1900-1945 and during the Croatian War of Independence) had an adverse effect on the development of museum activities. Over the last several years the number of newly founded museums and initiatives for the founding of museums in Croatia is on the increase, and the interest for establishing collections and museums stems mostly from local communities.

What is the cause of the rapid increase in the number of museums and do they really meet the needs they create? Regardless of the reasons for the increase, the importance of museums in contemporary society is undeniable. Museums exist to ensure a better living and common good through their creative role in the society or, in short, to entertain and be useful. Considering the fact that *culture* in the wider, social sense of the word is still understood as an elitist product, it is necessary to redefine the po-

<sup>1</sup> Šola, Tomislav. 2001. *Marketing u muzejima ili o vrlini i kako je obznaniti*. Zagreb: HMD, pp. 34-36.

<sup>2</sup> The comparison of museums and mushrooms was taken from T. Šola (2003:19).

<sup>3</sup> Sources for data: Cash, Joan, Picture Power, *Museum News*, July/August (1988), p. 24. and Kenneth Hudson, notes from a conversation (Šola, T. 2001. *Marketing u muzejima*. Zagreb: HMD, pp. 34-36).

<sup>4</sup> Source: Andreas Grote, lecture in Zagreb, 1990 (Šola, 2001: 36).

<sup>5</sup> EGMUS (European Group on Museum Statistics). Source: <http://www.egmus.minuskel.de>

<sup>6</sup> When consulting museum statistics, one should bear in mind the different criteria which, according to national categories, define museums (for example, church and college museums which often fall under non-museum categories). There is also the issue of private museums as they, for example in the Great Britain, unlike Germany, do not count as "real museums". Since 2003 for the purposes of its statistical report, EGMUS takes into consideration the number of museums, galleries and collections as museological facts, not as legal entities.

<sup>7</sup> The statistical overview based on the data from the Register of museums, galleries and collections in the Republic of Croatia for 2006 has been prepared and processed by Markita Franulić, Museum Documentation Center, Zagreb.

sition and significance of museums as non-profitable institutions in the service of society and their development within the overall cultural project.<sup>8</sup>

## A short introduction to the development and work of cultural studies

With the foundation of the British Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham<sup>9</sup> in 1964 the development of a new discipline began, with the goal to analyze and acknowledge the role of culture in (initially British) history and the study of contemporary forms and manifestations of culture previously located outside the usual academic interest, on the margins of life, work and entertainment.<sup>10</sup> The Center's most prominent representatives and associates, such as Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, Richard Johnson, Stuart Hall, Charlotte Brunsdon, Meaghan Morris and others, directed their interests toward the area of popular culture, working class culture, theories of gender and racial identities, cultures of travel and subcultural lifestyles, investigating at the same time the relationship towards the audience and the locations of cultural production.

The ultimate goal of cultural studies is, in short, to *understand the changes* taking place in contemporary culture as the projections of opposing models of representations and the diverse ways of life and opposing communicational strategies. Cultural studies distance themselves from the "traditionally" structured institutions, as they resist all three of the traditionally essential epistemological elements, namely discipline, object of research and research methods, although without intention to succeed or surpass individual scientific disciplines under the guise of interdisciplinarity. Cultural studies doesn't have a unified discourse or method, which is not surprising, considering the fact that the only starting point of their analysis, *culture*, is multidiscursive, i.e. its meanings become active in accordance with its usages within different traditions, historical contexts and relations of knowledge and power. Therefore it is very difficult to give a one-dimensional definition that would cover the wide area of the practice of cultural studies as an area that approaches cultural artifacts more from the standpoint of literary analysis, as texts to be read, and not as objects to be classified.

Tony Bennett, using the syntagm "reformer's science", suggests several definitions of cultural studies. Cultural studies deals with "all those practices, institutions and sys-

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<sup>8</sup> ICOM's code of professional ethics defines the purpose of a museum as '*a non-profit making permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, the tangible and intangible evidence of people and their environment.*' (Translator's note: quoted from <http://icom.museum/ethics.html#section1>).

<sup>9</sup> CCCS - Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, England.

<sup>10</sup> Cultural studies in Croatia is a new university practice initiated at the University of Zagreb in 2002 as a postgraduate study at the Department of Comparative Literature of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. Two years later an undergraduate study was established in Rijeka.

tems of classification through which there are inculcated in a population particular values, beliefs, competencies, routines of life and habitual forms of conduct” (1998: 28). An all encompassing cultural studies’ work is marked “by an interdisciplinary concern with the functioning of cultural practices in the contexts of relations of power of different kinds” (Bennett, 1998: 27). The forms of power within which culture is analyzed include “relations of gender, class and race as well as those relations of colonialism and imperialism which exist between the whole populations of different territories” (Bennett, 1998:28).

It is visible from the mentioned definitions that cultural studies engage in a continuous dialectic and permanent tension between the intercultural and academic life, analyzing new issues, models and ways of studying cultural practices and institutions in the context of various relations of power. How do museums as institutions function within contemporary society and culture, are they the indicators and mediators of contemporary changes, do we need them at all as cultural (heritage) institutions and why do they spring up like mushrooms; these are the questions I will try to answer within the framework of cultural studies’ theory, by analyzing several selected texts by prominent literary cultural theorists. What seems relevant within this selection of texts is Williams’s term of *selective tradition*, Hall’s analysis of identity from a deconstructionist standpoint and Bennett’s principle of the “multiplication of culture’s utility”.

## Culture in cultural studies

### “Ideal”, “documentary” and “social” definitions of culture

Raymond Williams, one of the founding fathers of cultural studies in his glossary *Keywords* claims that “[c]ulture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language” (1983:87). Trying to define the complex term of culture, Williams starts with its etymological roots in agriculture which at first meant something similar to *cultivation*.<sup>11</sup> Williams leads us from the physical through the metaphysical extension of the meaning to the social and educational ones in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and to the aesthetical and civic definition of culture in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and finally to the postmodernist pluralization of the term culture and the recent usage of *culturalism* (2003:14).

In further trying to define the concept of culture, Williams breaks down the term into three general categories: the “ideal”, “documentary” and “social” (2001: 57). The first one, *ideal* category defines culture as “a state or process of human perfection, in terms of certain absolute or universal values” (Ibid.). According to this definition culture is related to the ideal, the description of eternal values and universal human condition.

<sup>11</sup> The word *cultura* (Lat.) derives from the root of the Latin verb *colere* which had a range of meanings: cultivate, protect, honor with worship. In all its early uses culture was a noun referring to dealing with *something*, taking care of something, primarily crops or animals (Williams, 1983:87).

According to the second, *documentary* definition, culture is the “body of intellectual and imaginative work, in which, in a detailed way, human thought and experience are variously recorded”, and “the analysis of culture (...) is the activity of criticism, by which the nature of the thought and experience, the details of the language, form and convention in which these are active, are described and valued” (Ibid.). The examples of such activities are literary and art criticism which can be similar to the *ideal* analysis in discovering “the best that has been thought and written in the world” (Ibid.) or can, as a critical activity, be directed at the specific work being studied in the sense of explaining and valuing the work as its basic goal. It can include a type of historical criticism which, after the analysis, studies specific works in the context of social regions in which the works originated.

The third, *social* definition of culture defines culture as the “description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour” (Ibid.). This definition of culture encompasses the previously mentioned critical activity within the *documentary* analysis, but also includes the “clarification of the meanings and values implicit and explicit in a particular way of life, a particular culture”, as well as those elements of the way of life that “are not ‘culture’ at all: the organization of production, the structure of the family, the structure of institutions which express or govern social relationships, the characteristic forms through which members of the society communicate” (Williams 2001:58).

Williams concludes that each of the three definitions has its value and role in the analysis of culture as a whole, and that the focus on any of them independently is unacceptable; because, if the *ideal* definition is valuable due to its insistence on the wider, universal sense of searching for absolute values, it nevertheless sees man’s ideal development as separated from satisfying their concrete material needs. *Documentary definition* draws from material testimonies and finds values exclusively in written and visual sources and is thus separated from other areas of life. *Social* definition tends to see values and works as by-products, a passive reflection of real social interests. Therefore, in the interrelationship between culture and society, all activities and their interrelationships should be studied as equally valuable and as active reflections of human energy.

When Williams’s texts<sup>12</sup> was first published, museology was starting its attempts to define itself as a scientific discipline. There was a view within museologic theory that its subject matter was the museum, its historical development and activities, while museography in this view was the description of museum work techniques. Museum work was mostly directed at collecting and preserving objects and artwork and at museum architecture. It was only after 1976 that the museum object was acknowledged as an INDOC (information and documentation) object.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the development of

<sup>12</sup> Williams, R. 2001. “Analysis of Culture” In: *The Long Revolution*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp. 57-88.

<sup>13</sup> I. Maroević thinks that the foundation of ICOFOM (ICOM’s international committee for museology) and the acknowledgment of the museum artifact as an INDOC object in 1976 marks a new, theoretical and synthetic phase in the development of museology (Maroević, 1998:85).

semiology and communication theories affected the understanding of the museum as a medium, and of the museum object as a sign which, apart from its physical dimension, contains also an intellectual one and bears a certain meaning. When transferred into a new museum environment, every heritage object is extracted, “selected” from its reality in order to become its document. The documented value of an object is therefore the basis of museality which develops along the line of the relation between time and space. Furthermore, every *musealia*<sup>14</sup> is a communication object which develops an information process in the relation between the society and space it lives in, while in the relationship between time and society it develops a communication process of transfer of the values and messages of heritage as another important museological function (Maroević, 1998:142). Time, space and society become the three basic determinants through which the “life” of objects or the entire system of human heritage through the changes of their identity<sup>15</sup> and role in the society can be observed.

### “Structure of feeling” and “culture of the selective tradition”

The most difficult thing in studying past periods is, Williams thinks, to restore and experience that “sense of the quality of life” (p. 63), that “common element, which is neither the character nor the pattern, but as it were the actual experience through which these are lived”, and for this common element, which is the result of all the elements comprising the system, he proposes the term *structure of feeling* (2001: 64). The *structure of feeling* is not the structure that can be “learned”—every generation has its own structure of feelings, along with the specific manner of communication in relation to inherited values. Documentary culture, that is, the collected material testimonies of a period, can help us as bearers of different meanings settling in different periods of human history. Considering the fact that we are familiar only with one part of tangible heritage, the one preserved through time, the interpretation of history takes place through the process of selection.

The further attempt to define the complex term of culture involves the differentiation among the three levels of culture: “lived culture”, available exclusively to those living in the given time and space, “recorded culture” as the culture of a period, which includes art and everyday facts, and the “culture of the selective tradition” which as a factor relates the lived culture and the culture of different periods. Williams thinks that “[i]t is only in our own time and place that we can expect to know, in any substantial way, the general organization”, and that, in the course of transfer to the present, certain *elements* get irretrievably lost or, if it is possible to reconstruct them, reconstructed through abstraction (2006: 63).

<sup>14</sup> I. Maroević defines a «musealia» as an “authentic object (rarely a substitute), selected from its reality to become a document of that reality by the selection procedure” (Maroević, 1998:135).

<sup>15</sup> *Peter van Mensch* formulated three basic identities of museum objects: *conceptual identity* which precedes materialization, *factual identity* or the identity of the object at its origin and the *actual identity* of the object at the moment of contact (Maroević, 1998:180).

Thus, selective tradition through continuous selection, rejection and limitation allows for new reevaluations and interpretations of meaning. How can we define the culture of a period, taking into consideration this constant “selection and re-selection of ancestors” (Williams, 2006: 69)? The *structure of feeling*, the central concept of Williams’s theory, can be in a manner understood as the culture of a period. The *structure of feeling* is an attempt to resolve the duality of culture which is simultaneously stable and defined in the sense that any structure is, but also vague and elusive, because it refers not only to material, objective reality but also to lived experience, the most sensitive and least tangible aspects of our activities. It is in these examples of recorded communication that the real feeling of life is contained, the fellowship that enables recognizability.

## Museums in the context of various relations of power

Selective tradition is closely related to social development, through the process of historical change as well as in contemporary system of interests and values where a specific social situation affects “contemporary” selection. The selection in a society is guided by various special interests, including the class ones. So, cultural institutions often become the tool or strategy in the hands of the dominant forms of power. When Tony Bennett speaks of the “multiplication of culture’s utility”,<sup>16</sup> he defines the reforming strategies in the areas of culture and art in the British context of the second half of the 19th century. The opening of museums, art galleries and reading rooms across the country to the “regular people”, and not only to the privileged ones did not take place only due to aesthetic or educational purposes, but due to solving a series of social problems. So museums became, among other things, instruments of “civilizing the people”. Thanks to the aesthetic features of culture and their influence on the behavior of those exposed to them, museums were meant to bring about social good through transforming workers into new “prudential subjects”. Within the framework of English utilitarian cultural reform, the exposure of workers to culture involved the need to lead them to be sober and prudent. Therefore, culture served as a civilizing agent and a resource for introducing the people to more prudent modes of behavior. The nineteenth-century principle of multiplying the utility of culture resulted in a two-way positioning of culture: the creation of a prudential subject through the “civilizing” influence of culture that serves to reform a person’s behavior and the development of new capillary systems for the distribution of culture, i.e. the “utilization” of culture and expansion of its scope throughout the social body. The new forms of governmental power within nineteenth-century cultural management reflected in the “idea of the museum” as an instrument of public education.

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<sup>16</sup> Bennett, Tony. 1998. *Culture: A Reformer’s Science* (5. “The multiplication of culture’s utility”, pp. 107-128).

The role of museums in contemporary society has changed significantly. While traditional museums were in the service of the ruling class as a strategy for establishing and regulating power, contemporary museums are slowly but safely becoming a corrective and adaptive social mechanism, a form of social intervention of a sort. Contemporary, postindustrial and consumer society needs such mechanisms in order to secure the survival of identity and the continuity of collective memory. While museums in their glorious past served to elevate and glorify the elite and produce rigid scientific information, contemporary museums have a mission to document, process and communicate all collected information from the past, thus taking part in the development and becoming a productive, vital social force. The new mission of the museum refers not only to the affirmation of culture, but also to boosting the quality of life in general and to contribute to a better, more comfortable and fun living.

Raymond Williams, as was stated earlier, defined the theory of culture as “the study of relationships between elements in a whole way if life” (2006:63). For him, culture is a wider term, “a common good”, not an elite product. Cultural studies fight against the elitist definition of culture and in their discourse culture is “ordinary”, connected to the whole way of life and everyday activities which also produce meaning and contain certain values.

When Richard Johnson reflects on some arguments for and against the academic codification of cultural studies in his text<sup>17</sup>, he asks: “Is not the priority to become more ‘popular’ rather than more academic?” (2006:658). Because, the codification of knowledge stands in opposition to the openness and theoretical plurality of cultural studies, and cultural processes do not always correspond to the framework of academic knowledge. Johnson concludes that “[a]cademic knowledge forms (or some aspects of them) now look like part of the problem, rather than part of the solution”, and the fundamental question is: “what can be won from the academic concerns and skills to provide elements of useful knowledge?” (Ibid). Although culture is the central focus of interest of cultural studies, it is not viewed as a whole, but within the context of social power, where it produces constant analytical tensions through activating the political within its own discourse. The dynamics of social power reflects in the opposed definitions of culture: “high”/“low” or “elite”/“popular”. On the one end of the discourse Culture begins with a capital C, on the other end lie the symbolic practices and experiences of ordinary people.

In his “Notes on deconstructing the popular”<sup>18</sup> Stuart Hall draws attention to culture as a battlefield because active forms of popular culture are in constant opposition to-

<sup>17</sup> Johnson, Richard. 2006. “Što su uopće kulturalni studiji?”. In: *Politika teorije (zbornik rasprava iz kulturalnih studija)*. Duda D., ed. Zagreb: Disput d.o.o., pp. 63-106. (translated by Andrea Modly) (Translator's note: original quotation taken from Johnson, Richard. 2007. “What is Cultural Studies Anyway”, in: Ann Gray, Jan Campbell, Mark Erickson, Stuart Hanson and Helen Wood (eds.). 2007. *CCCS Selected Working Papers, Volume 1*, New York: Routledge)

<sup>18</sup> Hall, Stuart. 2006. “Bilješke uz dekonstruiranje popularnog”. In: *Politika teorije (zbornik rasprava iz kulturalnih studija)*. Duda D., ed. Zagreb: Disput d.o.o., pp. 297-309. (translated by Vlasta Paulić) (Translator's note: original quotation taken from Hall, Stuart. 1981. «Notes on deconstructing ‘the popular’», in: Raphael Samuel. 1981. *People's History and Socialist Theory*. London: Routledge)

wards the dominant culture. In this battle there is no final winner, although “dominant culture, constantly [tries] to disorganise and reorganise popular culture; to enclose and define its definitions and forms within a more inclusive range of dominant forms” (1981:233). Popular culture<sup>19</sup> is not to be viewed as inferior, less valuable in comparison to high culture, but it should be approached differently, with an appropriate critical discourse.

“Culture” is a complex, multidiscursive term, and considering the fact that a unique definition is not possible, the term often functions as an “umbrella term” because it covers all sorts of phenomena and symbolic practices. Because, if there exist “soccer culture”, “transition culture”, “café culture”, “culture of travel”, “food culture”, “political culture”, “sport culture”, “urban culture”, then it is perfectly acceptable to establish new types of museums that present and interpret different artifacts, phenomena or symbolic practices that are “well-liked by many people” and that are recognized as elements of popular culture. Therefore, if, on one hand, there exist complex museums of art, and on the other hand emerges the need for museums that deal not only with “fine” arts but also with everyday and contemporary cultural symbolic practices, in the sense that they educate and inform the public in a pleasant and entertaining way. The museum of today needs to include the whole public, all layers of society, not only the educated elite.

The number of newly established museums in Croatia has increased over the past several years<sup>20</sup>, while the cultural policy of the Republic of Croatia acknowledged the importance of museums as heritage and cultural institutions *par excellence*. The “Draft of the Strategy for cultural development of Croatia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century”<sup>21</sup> supports new, inventive museum types (The Museum of ties, Children’s Museum, Museum of Wom-

<sup>19</sup> Popular culture encompasses certain cultural practices, products and phenomena whose common meaning is determined in opposition to high culture. In his text “High culture/popular culture: *Heart of Darkness* and *Tarzan of the Apes*” Anthony Easthope cites three Williams’s definitions of the term “popular”: 1) “popular” as “well-liked by many people”, 2) “popular” in the contrast between high and popular culture and 3) “popular” used to describe culture “made by the people for themselves”, and brings a counter-definition of the third one according to which the term “popular” is used to “mean the mass media imposed on people by commercial interests”. (A. Easthope. 2006. “Visoka kultura / popularna kultura: *Srce tame i Tarzan među majmunima*”. In: *Politika teorije (zbornik rasprava iz kulturalnih studija)*. Duda D., ed. Zagreb: Disput d.o.o., pp. 297-309. (translated by Vlasta Paulić) (Translator’s note: original quotation taken from Easthope, Anthony: “High culture/popular culture: *Heart of Darkness* and *Tarzan of the Apes*”. 2005. In: Anthony Easthope. 2005. *Literary into Cultural Studies*. London: Routledge)

<sup>20</sup> Eco-museum “Kuća o batani/Casa della batana” (2004, Rovinj); Archeological museum Narona (2005, Vid near Metković); Museum and memorial center Dražen Petrović (2006, Zagreb); Museum of Greek and Roman glass in Zadar (2006); Archeological museum in Osijek (2007); Museum of old computers “PEEK & POKE” (2007, Rijeka), Town museum Crikvenica (2007, Crikvenica), Memorial collection of the composer Antun Dobronić (2007, Jelsa, the Island of Hvar), Croatian tourism museum (2008, Opatija); currently in the process of establishment: Museum of contemporary art (Zagreb), Museum of police (Zagreb), Museum of puppetry (Osijek), Museum of the Neanderthal of Krapina (Krapina) and the Museum of contemporary sculpture in Labin. Source: [www.mdc.hr/muzeji.aspx](http://www.mdc.hr/muzeji.aspx).

<sup>21</sup> Višnja Zgaga. 2002. “Nacrt strategije kulturnog razvitka Hrvatske u 21. stoljeću - muzeji”. In: *Informativa Museologica*. 33 (1-2), pp. 22-27. and website of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia: [http://www.min-kulture.hr/program/program\\_fr.html](http://www.min-kulture.hr/program/program_fr.html) (viewed June 18, 2003).

en Painting, Vladimir Dodig Trokut's Anti-Museum), museum forms that value the relation between the environment and authentic artifact (memorial centers and collections), and special value is added to the development of eco-museums as the model in which heritage of the local community is musealised *in situ*. One of the examples of a contemporary, inventive museum form is the Croatian artistic project called *Museum of broken relationships*.<sup>22</sup> Authors Vištica and Grubišić envisaged it as an artistic concept based on the idea of preserving artifacts that testify of passed love relationships. The main creator of the Museum's exhibition is the audience itself which, donating its own exhibits, testifies of the specificity of the environment and mentality of individual intimate stories. This traveling museum was guest in several European cities, Singapore and the USA, where it continued creating a space of "protected memory" for preserving the "emotional heritage" of broken love relationships.<sup>23</sup> Wishing to humor the audience and be as attractive as possible, contemporary museums are frequently on the path to the world of entertainment and profit. In order to avoid the possible "disneyfication" of museums, museums have to take care of a good interpretation of its material and of sending the message to the public and defining its mission with the goal of the common good in mind.

## Deconstructionist approach to identity

Terry Eagleton called the continuous dialectics and conflict over meaning in the contemporary (post)industrial society "culture wars", and by this syntagm he implies the rift between Culture and culture, the struggle between "custodians of the canon and devotees of *difference*" (2000:51). Eagleton also thinks that cultural wars are conducted in three different ways: between culture as civility, culture as identity and culture as commercial or postmodern, and defines them in short as excellence, *ethos* and economics. Along with the interest for popular culture, the question of identity through three of its basic problems (those of class, gender and race) is a part of cultural issues studied within the discourse of cultural studies, as well as in other disciplines.

Within cultural studies theory, Stuart Hall<sup>24</sup> wonders why there is such large need for "speculating" about identity and analyses the term within a deconstructionist approach. The deconstructionist viewpoint approaches key terms as "under erasure", as no longer usable in their original and un-reconstructed form, but as constructed in or through *différance*, through the relationship with the Other and towards something that is not, and is called a *constitutive outside*. The objective of the deconstructionist method is to show that categories and categorizations do not exist in absolute and

<sup>22</sup> The Museum of broken relationships was first introduced at the Zagreb Youth Salon in 2006. This is an original project of the art organization "Labirint" from Zagreb, and the authors of the project are Olinka Vištica and Dražen Grubišić.

<sup>23</sup> Spource: [www.net.hr/kultura/page/2009/01/13/0100006.html](http://www.net.hr/kultura/page/2009/01/13/0100006.html).

<sup>24</sup> Hall, Stuart. 2006. "Kome treba identitet?". In: *Politika teorije (zbornik rasprava iz kulturnih studija)*. Duda D., ed. Zagreb: Disput d.o.o., pp. 357-374. (translated by Sandra Veljković) (Translator's note: original quotation taken from Hall, Stuart. 1996: "Introduction: Who needs identity", in: Stuart hall and Paul du Gay (eds.). *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London: SAGE Publications)

rigid meanings, that it is not possible to *go unpunished* taking over and transplanting terms from one discourse to another without at the same time taking over their hypotheses and effects. Identity is one of such terms “operating ‘under erasure’ in the interval between reversal and emergence; an idea which cannot be thought in the old way, but without which certain key questions cannot be thought at all” (Hall, 1996:2). Therefore, Hall proposes the term *identification*, defining it as the “process of articulation, a suturing, an over-determination not a subsumption”, as a never-ending process based on the recognition of common origin or common feature shared with another person or group. Hall’s concept of identity does not imply an essentialist subject-rooted order holding a predictable meaning, but a temporally and spatially contingent, intrinsically plural and contradictory, strategic and positional identity built and multiplied through different intersecting discourses, practices and positions.

Identity in the postmodern society is a continuous change and transformation. The dominant culture which is, according to Eagleton, a blend of excellence, *ethos* and economy, is increasingly subverting traditional identities. An increased growth of the number of museums over the last several decades is nothing but an answer to the loss of identity in the “global” culture. People of modern society are forgetful. The excess of information causes the deletion of memories, and globalization causes the loss of roots, personality, originality, freedom, the loss of belonging. The power of the electronic media (the internet, television, radio, mobile phones ...), as well as the availability of press and the quantity of books produced increase in geometrical progression and cause crucial changes in the overall communication among the members of a culture, changes in the communication between the culture and the past (tradition) and the communication among simultaneously existing cultures. The emphasis is on the present (“present” in alternative movements and learning, hyperreality in everyday life), while the fear of future grows larger, and the past serves as a retreat from the present. In this sense museum is an antidote, a corrective and adaptive societal mechanism with the mission to defend identity and secure its continuity.

## Conclusion

Museums as heritage institutions continuously select and interpret, transfer material and spiritual testimonies from a rich treasury of the past to the present, thus creating a new culture, the culture of selective tradition. Hereby, every element studied is seen as active within real relations, taking into consideration the documentary, ideal and social analysis of culture as equally valuable. It is due to selective tradition that cultural institutions dealing with the preservation and transfer of tradition are dedicated to tradition as a whole, not only to the selected parts that correspond to contemporary interests and expectations, thus enabling the reevaluation and rediscovery of values of the previously discarded activities.

During the first “museum boom” (second half of the 19th century) which was brought about by the idea of progress, industrial and technological development, urbaniza-

tion, the new experience of time and space, but also as the motif of prestige and the support for the ruling elite, the role of museum represented the accumulation of encyclopedic knowledge and affirmation of national consciousness.<sup>25</sup> The museum also served as a means for the “multiplication of culture’s utility”, as a new form of governmental power and an instrument of public education. The second “museum boom” was caused by new circumstances in the world we live in over the last fifty years: informatization, the increase in the level of education, ideological and political uniformity of the world, the processes of disculturation and commodification of culture, that is, turning culture into commodity, subject to market rules. The process of modernization resulted in the growing distance between people and their past, which in turn caused the fear of identity loss, and the subsequent desire to regain it. The reasons for the rapid growth of the number of museums therefore have to be observed within a wider economic, political, and cultural context.

The culture industry made culture the top priority of our time, and museums, as parts of the culture industry and participants in radical social changes, are forced to keep balance between the opposing poles of historical elitism and popular culture. Modern consumer society based on mass communication imposed new responsibilities on culture. The demands of the audience and users are increasingly moving towards an alliance between art and entertainment, towards the entertainment industry of the mass media which integrates art as well. Contemporary museums represent a place in which one can learn, play, paint, construct, experiment, eat, drink tea, chat, buy or otherwise spend one’s free time usefully. The focus is on tactile experience, attraction, interactive and multimedia approach to exhibiting. The door of the museum is open, and the borders of activities are being increasingly stretched to include the user and the wider community. Considering the appearance in the second half of the twentieth century of phenomena and discourses previously not present within the framework of interest of humanist disciplines, which are defined as contemporary popular culture (daily newspaper, music, weekly magazines, television shows, lifestyles), a need emerged for establishing new types of museums or at least projects within the existing ones that try to answer complex questions of contemporary life. Parallel to the development of new types of museological activity goes the reconceptualization of “traditional” museums which embrace contemporary aspects of exhibiting and presenting their material.

The rapid increase in the number of museums is also the sign of a certain conceptual crisis because, regardless of the fact that museums “spring up like mushrooms”, it can be concluded that not all “mushrooms are edible”.<sup>26</sup> Only those museums established upon a new pattern, upon the paradigm that shifts its focus from the collection and the curator to the communication of the overall identity of a community, answer the needs of the contemporary society.

<sup>25</sup> In the first chapter of his book “*The representation of the past ...*” Peter Walsh lists the factors that lead to the first museum boom (“The first museums boom”) in Great Britain, but uses the term for the wider European context as well (Walsh 1992:30-31).

<sup>26</sup> The comparison of museum «springing up like mushrooms» and the fact that «not all mushrooms are edible» is taken from T. Šola (Šola, 2003: 19).

In this sense new museums as museums of identity would tend towards interdisciplinarity, relying on collective memory and heritage. Future centers for heritage and local development (already partially recognized through the concept of eco-museums) should be, as heritage-focused actions with the goal to acknowledge, preserve and integrally interpret the identity of a territory or community, the most similar to the concept of museums that answers the needs and desires of a society and which at the same time confirms Williams's theory of culture as "the study of relationships between elements in a whole way of life", or a unified system of civilizational, cultural, natural, social, economic and geographic values (2006: 39). In this manner the nineteenth-century concept of identity manipulation with the purpose of positioning culture would be replaced by a strategy of identity management.

In the end we have to ask ourselves: do we need museums as (heritage) institutions? In his analysis of culture Williams thinks that the tendency of many academic institutions towards self-perpetuation and their insensitiveness to change is often a great obstacle on the path of societal development. Change is necessary, as is the establishment of new institutions, but only if we understand the process of selective tradition correctly. The role of museums in the community is multiple: social and cultural benefits (cultural centers, development of identity in the area they exist in, educational function), economic benefits (tourism), political benefits (developing a sense of belonging). Museums are places for appreciating change but also an instrument of development. They are necessary for the survival of identity, the preservation of collective memory and the development of the community they serve. Concerning the conceptual crisis and great changes in heritage institutions, as well as the fact that museums are "too important to be relevant only to science" (Šola, 2003: 20), cultural studies, as a multidisciplinary area that shifts boundaries and tries to understand how culture works in contemporary society, with the special interest in the significance of identity and the multiple ways it is transferred and experienced, could be of great help on the museums' way towards redefining their role and mission.

*Translated by Ivona Grgurinović*